Metropolitan Hilarion: It is urgent that a system of protecting Christians against persecution be organized

Esteemed Mr. Prime-Minister,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have assembled here in Jamaica not only to sum up the Decade to Overcome Violence declared by the World Council of Churches in 2001 but also to discern together the scale and forms taken by violence in today's world. The principle question we have to answer is what we as Christians can do together in the face of growing violence, aggression, exploitation and terror. Symbolically, the World Council has accepted the invitation of churches in Jamaica and chosen for this forum this very beautiful island, which at the same time is a place with one of the heaviest rates of violence in the world.

Violence pervades the life of humankind today. It would seem that peace-loving rhetoric has prevailed in international organizations and at an intergovernmental level, as political leaders and scientific and cultural figures talk incessantly about reconciliation, forgiveness, purification of memory and non-violence. The United Nations keeps adopting ever new resolutions condemning any forms of violence, and criminal legislation in many countries has introduced responsibility for crimes against humanity. International instruments clearly state that military interference constitutes *ultima ratio*, the last resort for curbing evil.

At the same time, TV screens send down on us daily a torrent of what could be called a systematic estheticisation of violence, cruelty, abuse and other manifestations of evil. Films with violent scenes

appear to be very popular, especially among young people. A conclusion inevitably comes to mind: the commercial advantage of the distribution of such video products is so great that it makes it quite possible to close one's eyes to the glaring contradiction between official rhetoric and what we see on TV screens every day. Is the price the community pays for domestic violence, growing crime, terrorism and other dreadful things less than the profit made by producers and distributors of films focused on aggression? The modern pluralistic society seems unable to offer proper discernment of the disastrous consequences of this discrepancy between word and deed, since by definition it gives room to any evil disguised normally under such notions as 'freedom of choice', 'freedom of speech', freedom of expression' and 'individual freedom'.

In our days, violence has acquired a structural and systemic character as it is no longer committed merely by individuals but by organized structures. This kind of violence should rather be called exploitation and injustice. Take for instance the methods and terms of trade and economic relations between rich states of the North and developing countries of the South, which more often than not have an enslaving nature. As a result, poor countries become poorer while rich ones richer.

The list of diverse forms and manifestations of violence and injustice can be extended endlessly, but our task is to identify the cause of this evil and to overcome not the consequences but the cause. Regrettably, Christian churches speak out more often on specific problems arising for certain reasons without seeking to expose their cause. If Christians still can be 'a prophetic voice' in the world, not only the voice crying in the wilderness, we ought to fearlessly expose the injustice of modern society without fear of tarnishing our reputation in the eyes of the powers that be and the mass media under their control.

However paradoxical it may seem, the more talk about justice in the world the less, alas, we see it in our life. We live in an atmosphere where double standards have prevailed, where cynicism predominates, concealed politically correctly under the mask of democracy and concern for human rights, which in fact tramples and distorts both.

There is at last a discussion in the world today not about an abstract infringement on the religious freedom of particular minorities but about the open persecution of Christians. It is no longer possible to hush up the facts that have long become well-planned indeed, not spontaneous persecution at all. Even the European Parliament, where certain members consistently sought to oust any mention of Christian values in European history, adopted for the first time in its history a truly revolutionary resolution on Christianophobia. In its wake the Italian Parliament's House of Representatives adopted a similar resolution obliging authorities to oppose attempts to subject Christians to discrimination.

Today reports are coming again and again about attacks against Christians in Egypt, Iraq, India,

Pakistan and Indonesia and a number of other countries, predominantly Muslim. For instance, more than a half of the Christian population has already fled from Iraq because of the daily threat to their life.

In countries in which Christians are a minority there is no effective system for their protection. For instance, in Egypt the police and military are reported to avoid interfering in mass assaults on the Copts while the Prosecutor's Office refuses to begin criminal proceedings against Muslim extremists, qualifying the continued bloodshed as 'interreligious clashes' for which, they say, both sides are to be blamed.

What are we doing as Christians today to protect our brothers and sisters in faith who are subjected daily to humiliation, threats and discrimination on the grounds of religious intolerance? Regrettably, more often than not we do not go beyond statements, press releases, condolences and politically correct 'expressions of concern'. The hour has come to move to effective actions. We urgently need to organize a system of protecting Christians against persecution. In the first place, it is necessary to set up information structures to monitor crimes committed on the grounds of religious hatred. The Christian community for all its disunity should unite and request the UN, governmental and international organizations to put an end to the persecution against Christians in today's world.

Christian churches and communities should put real content in their peace and human rights work, taking care in the first place of their brothers and sisters subjected to persecution in some parts of the world. St. Paul calls us: *As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers* (Gal. 6:10); otherwise we will simply turn into one of hundreds of unobtrusive social institutions for promoting the building of peace.

In Russia there have been no religious wars or religious confrontations in our history. People in our country have been able to find a language of mutual understanding, friendship and good-neighbourliness despite their differences in faith, culture and way of life. For developing inter-confessional cooperation, an Interreligious Council was established in 1998, in which leaders of traditional religions discuss together arising complexities and find ways to resolve them. A Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations under the President of the Russian Federation has successfully worked for several years now. I will emphasize that the government has given great attention to the problems of peaceful co-existence of religions in multinational Russia. The way in which stable and benevolent relations were built and continue to be built between religions in Russia may serve as a lesson for using the same principles on the international arena as well.

Peace is a gift of God sent from above to the people who have repented of their sins. This world lying in evil as it is cannot build peace from itself, whatever peace concepts it may try to work out, for evil is an integral part of it. We remember the prophecy of St. Paul: *While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,'*

destruction will come on them suddenly (1 Thess. 5, 3). It means therefore that God's peace is found in ways different from the artificial construction of peaceful co-existence or the legal regulation of social order mechanisms. We as Christians are called to point out these ways to the world, showing that it cannot be put on them either by progress or rationalism or various concepts of 'just peace'. Unity, about which so much was spoken in the history of the 20th century Christian Churches, will be another example of meaningless and valueless rhetoric if we do not unite now our efforts for saving 'ours in faith' who suffer from the ill will of those who seek to fill the earth with hate, enmity, bloodshed while calling for building a religious community on a global scale.

The different way is indicated in the Beatitudes. The Gospel teaches us that peace is to be built and strengthened without killing enemies but by killing hostility, as the Lord Himself did on the Cross (Eph. 2:16).

On behalf of the Russian Orthodox Church I call upon both the powers that be and ordinary believers to show solidarity with persecuted Christians. The future of mankind should be built on peace and justice commanded by God, otherwise mankind has no future.

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